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Shortgrass Country

By Monte Noelke

As soon as carpenters are found who will work out of town, the east wall of this ranch house is coming down. No more underwriting ant powder companies, or backing fly spray manufacturers for this outfit. Mice and spiders can pass at will; if a ground squirrel wishes to den up under the living room couch, he's welcome to take his chances with whatever other varmint or vermin may be living there.

The last hope of holding nature back began in the spring and ended a few days ago. For six long weeks, four colonies of red sugar ants trailed across the kitchen drainboard and into every crevice of the cupboard.

On each shopping excursion to San Angelo, different toxicants were imported. I lived in a world of labeled skulls and crossbones and black flags. The ants broke into new territories and I trembled to think of the fumes I was breathing.

The final or closing step came at the end of the fourth week in another part of the house. As is my custom, I sat down at my desk on a Saturday morning to write an article. Before starting work, I idly opened the lap drawer of the desk. At that moment, a 20-inch rat snake lifted his head

from a coil made in a nest of letters, paper clips, and a collection of refill cartridges for ballpoint pens.

As the snake raised his head I jumped upwards and backwards into a bamboo shade with enough force to crush the sticks in a spot 14 inches wide by 35 inches long. One of my sons, a former snake trapper, disposed of the monster.

For the rest of the day, I packed a .455 Webley service revolver with all chambers loaded with 400-grain bullets. I ate nothing and slept only in snatches in the big chair in the living room.

Sure, I could keep the revolver handy and perhaps import a mongoose from India to live with me. And no doubt the desk drawer can be realigned to open and close like it once did; and for that matter, bamboo shades aren't extravagant window dressings.

But all the fight has gone out of me. I will not be persuaded to resist any longer. Unless reinforcements arrive before the carpenters do, I am giving up the fight.